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ABSTRACT

A study examined the results of the use of the "Assessing Motivation To Communicate" (AMTC) computerized program with high school students in Anchorage, Alaska, during the 1995-96 school year. The AMTC consists of two self-assessment instruments: the Personal Report of Communication (PRCA-24) and the Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Four department heads and seven teachers participated. Results in student assessments returned by 79 students indicated that 100% found the computer program easy to use and (PRCA-24, 85% and WTC 100%) could respond to all the questions; 89% felt they had enough personal experience to respond to the PRCA-24; and all felt that they had enough personal experience to respond to the WTC. In addition, 68% who took the PRCA-24 and 50% of those who took the WTC felt that their score really reflected their true feelings; 42% did not share their PRCA scores and 40% did not share their WTC scores with teachers, although 68% and 59%, respectively, shared the scores with other students. Results revealed that 31% felt they had a problem with communication apprehension and all but one indicated they had some help with this from their teacher. Results also revealed that most students felt that taking the test was worth their time and that the AMTC should be included for beginning students. (CR)

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AMTC: Assessing Motivation to Communicate in the Ninth Grade Speech Class

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AMTC: Assessing Motivation to Communicate in the Ninth Grade Speech Class

Introduction

AMTC Assessing Motivation to Communicate is a computerized assessment with supporting materials. The materials are presented in an attractive three ring binder that includes the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and Willingness To Communicate measures on a computer disk, a fact sheet on the program, directions for administrators, a sample lecture for instructors introducing and debriefing the AMTC, and a set of journal articles on the nature of communication apprehension and unwillingness to communicate (Morreale, Hamilton, and Berko, 1994).

The two assessment instruments presented are computer administered versions of the Personal Report of Communication (PRCA-24) and the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC). Both instruments have a long history of use in the classroom as well as in clinical and research settings. They have had extensive testing and reports of the reliability, validity, and bias are widely available. The instruments focus on prior experience with communication situations and predispositions toward performance in various types of situations (McCroskey, 1970; McCroskey and Richmond, 1987).

Sherwyn Morreale, Roger Hamilton and Roy Berko developed AMTC Assessing Motivation to Communicate as part of the SCA Diagnostic Series. The AMTC is intended to provide teachers and communication professionals with tools to use in assessing and improving communication skills. The computerized versions of PRCA-24 and the WTC scales provide a convenient tool which may be used by institutions, communication education programs, and individual teachers for the large-scale diagnosis and assessment of student predisposition's toward communication.

Goals set out in the AMTC materials indicate that the authors foresee multiple uses for the self-administered computerized assessments. Students can evaluate their own status and seek advise and assistance if the assessment result show unusual levels of apprehension or unwillingness to communicate. Teachers can assess student needs in order to revise course content and pedagogy. Administrators can evaluate program needs, facilitate the appropriate placement of students, and demonstrate the efficacy of programs and courses. (Morreale, Hamilton, and Berko, 1994).

While various earlier versions of the PRCA and WTC have had successful use with high school students, there has been no reported use of the AMTC

in secondary schools. A personal communication from one of the authors, Roy Berko, indicated that the AMTC had not, to his knowledge, been used with secondary students (Berko, 1993). This paper reports the results of a project to try out the AMTC with high school students in Anchorage, AK during the 1995-96 school year.

The Trial

The Anchorage School District is a large, urban public school district located in Anchorage Alaska. Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing are integrated into a Language Arts Curriculum. There are no requirements for training in Speech Communication for a secondary language arts certification in Alaska.

The AMTC was introduced to the eight high school Language Arts Department Heads in the Spring of 1994. After a brief discussion it was determined that it would be appropriate to do a trial of the materials with teachers and students participating in the ninth grade English Course. The course objectives call for the development of speaking and listening skills.

The Anchorage School District purchased two sets of AMTC materials for each high school and an additional set for the Assessment and Evaluation Department office. SCA provided permission do duplicate the AMTC disks and materials as necessary for teachers who might need multiple copies for concurrent use on multiple-computers or for use in school libraries and computer centers.

Department Heads were asked to present the AMTC materials to their staff members. Department Heads were asked to review the AMTC materials. They were also asked to solicit a minimum of two teachers of grade nine English classes to review the materials and to do a trial of the AMTC with one class of students. Given average class sizes, this should have resulted in a trial with 14 teachers and about 300 students.

Materials were distributed to Department Heads in October of 1995. A check with Department Heads about two weeks after the initial distribution of materials indicated that there were some problems. Some teachers reported that disks were missing from the note books they received, some reported that disks did not work on the computers they had available, and some reported that they did not have access to computers. Additional disks were copied and tested using the Assessment and Evaluation disk as a master. School library and media staff were contacted about the availability of suitable computers, and one computer was procured and loaned to a teacher at one high school.

A mid-year visit to a Language Arts Department Heads meeting solicited no reports of additional problems. A reminder memo with sample assessment forms for department heads, teachers, and students was distributed to Department Heads in March with a request that Assessment and Evaluation be contacted if there were problems.

Department heads were called in April as a reminder about the project and they were asked see that assessment materials were returned. The loaned computer, AMTC materials, and assessments were returned in May, 1996.

Findings

The response from Department Heads.

Four of seven Department Heads had actually tried and reviewed the AMTC materials. The consensus was that the articles and supporting materials were too complicated for high school teachers. They felt that the AMTC programs, PRCA-24 and WTC, had a potential of being valuable tools. They also reported that for the most part teachers did not emphasize speech activities and that few teachers had been interested in trying out the materials.

The response from teachers.

Eight teachers indicated that they had reviewed the materials and tried them with students. One of these who had returned an incomplete assessment was eliminated when a telephone interview showed that she did not have a rudimentary knowledge of the AMTC.

Teacher reports on their prior training and the actual inclusion of speech activities in their classes were mixed. Most reported that they did not, in fact, include many speaking activities in classes. Most of the activities reported were participation in group discussions, dramatic readings, or reports to the class. Only one included a substantial component related to the traditional themes of a speech class -- audience analysis, research and speech development, argumentation, and the development and refinement of presentation skills. One teacher indicated that apprehension was no problem among her students because oral activities were not emphasized and were never graded.

Only one of the teachers indicated formal training in teaching speaking or listening skills beyond having had an undergraduate college Speech class. None of the teachers reported having a methods course in teaching speaking and listening skills. One teacher reported that listening skills had been included in a secondary methods course and two reported that they had courses in drama. The one teacher who reported specific training in working

with students who suffer from communication apprehension has taught Speech Communication courses as an adjunct professor at a local university.

Most teachers felt that the AMTC would only be useful as part of a complete program to help students. Comments indicated that they felt that they found the journal articles included with the AMTC difficult to read but interesting.

Here is a sample of the type of comments made by teachers.

- The AMTC is appropriate for use in Speech/Language Arts courses with high school students. Students had no problem in using the computer program.
- It is important to work with students who suffer from communication apprehension.
- The materials were appropriate for most students. Some had trouble understanding the scores -- thought low was bad.
- The materials should only be used with students who want to use them.
- It is important to include speaking and presentation skills in high school courses.
- Communication apprehension is a moderate problem for high school students. Not all students need assistance.

The response from students.

Student assessments were returned by 79 students. One student indicated that the WTC section of the program had failed and only commented on the PRCA-24.

Students found the computer program easy to use (100%) and for the most part reported that they understood and could respond to all of the questions (PRCA-24, 85%; WTC, 100%). Eighty-nine percent felt they had enough personal experience to respond to the PRCA-24. All felt that they had enough personal experience to respond to the WTC.

Sixty-eight percent of those who took the PRCA and fifty percent of those who took the WTC felt that their score really reflected the way they felt about communication situations. Many of the students reported that they had not shared their PRCA scores (42%) or WTC scores (40%) with teachers. They were more likely to have shared the scores with other students (PRCA, 68%; WTC, 59%).

Thirty-one percent of the students felt that they had a problem with communication apprehension and all but one of these students indicated that they had some help from their teacher in dealing with apprehension.

Most students felt that taking the tests was worth their time (PRCA, 52%; WTC, 65%) and many indicated that they thought the test scores helped them to better understand their feelings about communication (PRCA, 47%; WTC, 44%). The majority of students felt that the AMTC should be included for students in a beginning high school Speech/English class (PRCA, 63%: WTC, 71%).

Some students provided brief written comments in response to the question: "Do you have any suggestions for the people who made these tests or set up the computer programs? Here are some of the typical comments:

- Don't give up your day job.
- There should be a better variety of questions.
- It should be a better quiz.
- This bores students to death.
- You should try to make the results easier to read.
- The scores need to be made more understandable.
- I think this would be good for students in a speech class.
- You need to add some more interesting questions.
- Not enough questions. I don't think there were enough questions for the computer to know my true feelings.
- Too many questions ask the same thing.
- Program messed up. No scores for second test.
- Don't repeat your questions -- PRCA-24.
- This is kind of hard to believe.
- It did not tell me anything that I did not know.
- It is just fine.

Conclusions/Reflections

The trial of the AMTC by teachers and students in a grade 9 Speech/English class allows some tentative conclusions about the SCA materials and their utility. These conclusions should be taken against the background of an environment where teachers have had little formal training in teaching oral communication skills and, in some cases, do not include much instruction in these skills.

- Availability of computers and development of a familiarity with the use of the software are prerequisites for successful use of the AMTC.

- Having to track down and organize computer resources was enough of a burden that it discouraged use by some teachers even when the resources existed within the school.

- The AMTC materials are not as user-friendly as they might be for secondary teachers. Secondary teachers do not customarily read

scholarly journals and translate research articles into instruction. Materials need to be more in the format of the instructor's manuals and lesson materials commonly in use with high school students.

- Students had no problem with the use of the AMTC programs. There is some indication that the grade 9 students did not feel that they had the personal experience necessary to answer some of the PRCA-24 items. A few students reported difficulty with directions and interpretation of scores.

The overall conclusion is that the AMTC could be a useful tool in secondary classes if the materials are reformed to be in a style more comfortable for secondary teachers and students. It may be of value to prepare a secondary supplement to the AMTC which includes revised instructions, interpretive materials for students, and an instructional unit on dealing with communication apprehension.

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